

7. Lorenzo Snow, in Conference Report, April 1901, 3.
8. There is some question about the authorship of Hebrews. Protestant scholarship generally rejects the Pauline authorship of the epistle, but Catholic scholarship accepts it. For a Latter-day Saint discussion of these two points of view, see Sidney B. Sperry, *Paul's Life and Letters* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), 268–72, and Richard L. Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 197–201.
9. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary, Book I* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 1:367–68.
10. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 1:25.
11. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 1:369.
12. Smith, *Teachings*, 392.
13. Lorenzo Snow, in Conference Report, April 1901, 3.
14. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 3:206.
15. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration: A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants and Other Modern Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 673.
16. Smith, *Teachings*, 346–47.
17. Smith, *Teachings*, 348.



Painting by Dale Parson, *Jesus as a Youth in the Carpenter's Shop*

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“He Received . . . Grace for Grace” (D&C 93:12)

Bryce L. Dunford

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Those who teach the gospel walk a very delicate tightrope. On the one hand, we say to our students, “You must obey all of the commandments in order to be exalted. Justice will demand nothing less.” On the other hand, we say, “Have hope! Even though you are filled with imperfections, mercy will make exaltation possible.” Though both statements are true, each must be taught in balance with the other.

To teach mercy without justice may lead students to believe what Nephi prophesied many in our day would believe: “And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; . . . and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 28:8).

Conversely, to teach justice without mercy may leave students very discouraged. They may see salvation as out of their reach—too demanding for the imperfect people they are.

One way to stay balanced is to point our students to Jesus Christ, the model of salvation. His life is *the* pattern. By following Him, we can find mercy and grace sufficient to help us meet the demanding requirements of exaltation.

### **Where Is the Prototype?**

As the brethren who participated in the Kirtland School of the Prophets discussed the requirements of salvation, they sought to find a prototype or an example of a saved (or exalted) being. They reasoned: “For if we can find a saved being, we may ascertain without much difficulty what all others must be in order to be saved, . . . for whatever constitutes the salvation of [the prototype] will constitute the salvation of every creature which will be saved; and if we find one saved being in all existence, we may see what all others must be, or else not be saved.”<sup>clxiv</sup> 1

Their conclusion was as obvious then as it is today: “We conclude, as to the answer of this question [Where is the prototype?], there will be no dispute among those who believe the Bible, that it is Christ; all will agree in this, that He is the prototype or standard of salvation; or, in other words, that He is a saved being.”<sup>clxv</sup> 2

Therefore, if we understand how Christ worked out His own salvation, we can thereby see the very path that each of us must tread to obtain the same glory. As the Savior Himself stated, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

So how did Christ gain His salvation?

### **He Received Not of the Fulness at the First**

Although the New Testament writers are reverently silent with respect to the Savior’s childhood and young adult years, we have been given a marvelous insight into His spiritual development in the Doctrine and Covenants. Quoting the record of John, whose record is “hereafter to be revealed” (D&C 93:6; see also verse 18), we read that Christ “received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace” (D&C 93:12). Jesus was not born with a fulness of knowledge or glory. This idea is repeated three times in three consecutive verses (see D&C 93:12–14).

Later,<sup>clxvi</sup> 3 “he received a fulness of the glory of the Father; and he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him” (D&C 93:16–17). However, as the repetition emphasizes, this change did not happen in a moment. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, advanced and progressed “grace for grace” until He reached a fulness.

After stating these truths, the Lord then proclaimed, “I give unto you these sayings that *you may understand and know how to worship*, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, *and in due time* receive of his fulness” (D&C 93:19; emphasis added). Jesus

is the pattern for each of us. If we, like Him, advance and progress grace for grace, we will eventually receive a fulness of the Father's glory, power, and light as He did (see D&C 50:24). President Joseph F. Smith declared:

Even Christ himself was not perfect at first; he received not a fulness at first, but he received grace for grace, and he continued to receive more and more until he received a fulness. Is not this to be so with the children of men? Is any man perfect? Has any man received a fulness at once? Have we reached a point wherein we may receive the fulness of God, of his glory, and his intelligence? No; and yet, if Jesus, the Son of God, and the Father of the heavens and the earth in which we dwell, received not a fulness at the first, but increased in faith, knowledge, understanding and grace until he received a fulness, is it not possible for all men who are born of women to receive little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept, until they shall receive a fulness, as he has received a fulness, and be exalted with him in the presence of the Father?<sup>clxvii</sup>4

### **Grace for Grace**

As Christ progressed, He offered to the Father His obedience and willingness to do the Father's will<sup>clxviii</sup>5 and received from the Father the appropriate "grace for grace." We are to follow this same pattern. The Lord explained, "For if you keep my commandments [this is what we continually give to God—our obedience] you shall receive of his fulness [this is what God gives to us—a portion of His fulness], and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace" (D&C 93:20).

Elder Gene R. Cook, in the April 2002 general conference, taught, "The Lord's response to us is always filled with love. Should not our response to Him be in kind, with real feelings of love? He gives grace (or goodness) for grace, attribute for attribute. As our obedience increases, we receive more grace (or goodness) for the grace we return to Him."<sup>clxix</sup>6

If we combine two verses of scripture, we can see that this process, "grace for grace," is not a one-time exchange but rather is a continuous cycle that will last a lifetime and beyond. The first scripture states, "He that keepeth his [the Lord's] commandments receiveth truth and light" (D&C 93:28). The second adds, "Of him unto whom much is given much is required" (D&C 82:3).

If individuals have been given added light and knowledge because of their obedience, they are required to be more obedient than they were before they received the added light. If they, in turn, increase their obedience, humility, and repentance to match the new added light, they receive additional light, which requires them to live a higher level of obedience. If they increase their obedience, they receive an increase in light, and so on. This cycle continues "until," as the Lord stated, the individual "is glorified in truth and knoweth all things" (D&C 93:28).

### **The Staircase**

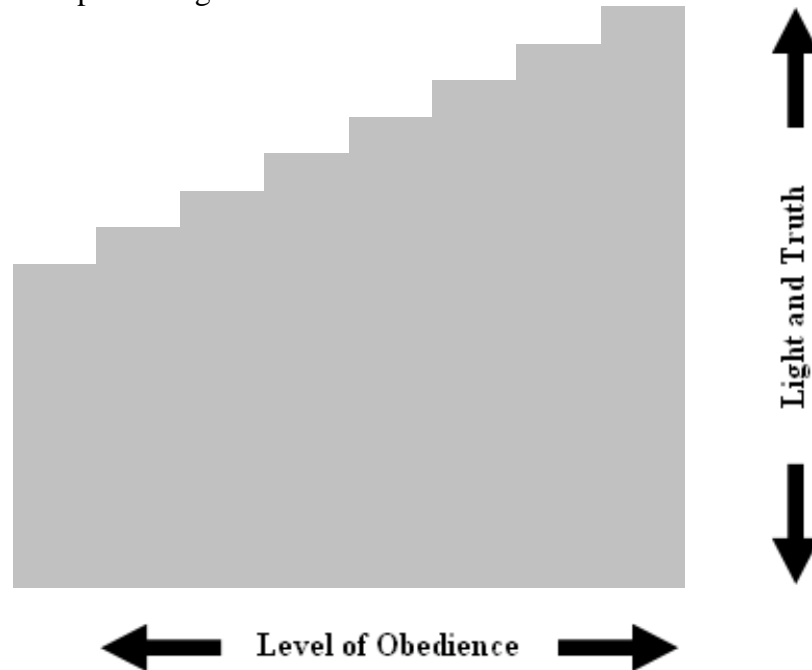
To better understand this process, let's compare our journey along the straight and narrow path to a climb up a very long staircase. To climb a staircase, one must move in two directions: upward and forward.

We move upward by gaining light and truth from God. Receiving more light moves us farther upward. Losing light would move us in a downward direction. The highest spot on the staircase represents one who has been given all the light and truth that God possesses—in other words, a fulness of light.

Moving forward or backward corresponds to our obedience. Increasing our obedience moves us forward; decreasing our obedience moves us backward. The forward-most spot on the staircase

represents the greatest level of obedience, or one who obeys every commandment as perfectly as God obeys them.

The steps on the staircase represent the relationship between each amount of light and each level of obedience. One who possesses only a small amount of light is required to obey only a small amount; greater light corresponds to greater obedience.



**Note: There are many more steps than can be represented.**

This is the process: Every individual comes into the world with an initial endowment of light (see D&C 84:46; 93:2). That places us on one of the first steps of the staircase. No one begins at ground level. However, where light is given, obedience is required. Being on one of the first steps requires us to obey to some extent. When our obedience matches that initial requirement, the Lord blesses us with additional light and truth, leading us to place one foot on the next step. The reality is that we take this and every other step with the help of God's grace. The Bible Dictionary teaches, "It is likewise through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts."<sup>clxx7</sup> Our foot on this next step not only marks that we have received a new gift of light from God but also signifies the level of obedience that is required of someone with that amount of additional light. However, we still have a foot back on the previous step. This foot marks our actual level of obedience.

This moment is critical. One of three things will eventually happen. Either we will elevate our obedience, with God's grace assisting us (see D&C 109:44), to match our new level of light—thus raising our lower foot up to the next step or we will move backwards and decrease our obedience—thus moving our lower foot to the previous step and losing the light that the Lord granted us or we will become content to not move at all but to remain where we are on the staircase.

Nephi describes this critical moment with these words: “For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; *for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have*” (2 Nephi 28:30; emphasis added; see also Alma 12:10–11).

Let’s suppose that we take a step forward—that we, with the Lord’s help, change some areas of our life that need improvement. This is more than just wishing we were better people.

Improvement means changing attitudes or behaviors. Increased obedience allows us to progress and place our back foot firmly on the next step. Now both feet are together. The Lord can bless us with more light and truth. That is the Lord’s promise. Consequently, we now take one foot and place it on the *next* step. The process begins all over again.

Gradually, we continue up the staircase. Each step consists of being a little more obedient than the previous step. Each step brings added light and knowledge to help us take the next step. Day by day, step by step, year after year we gradually move forward, onward, upward, until ultimately, if we endure to the end, we will reach the top. Along the way, we do not climb alone. The Lord has promised: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you; and ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for *I will lead you along*. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours” (D&C 78:17–18; emphasis added).

### **A Caution**

As we journey up this grand staircase, with all of its challenges and temptations and setbacks, there is one thing we must never do: we must not compare ourselves to others.

Some will have a tendency to look up the staircase and see family members, friends, associates, and other Church members who have climbed to higher steps. They look at the distance between these people and themselves and become discouraged. Elder Marvin J. Ashton observed:

Perhaps we all live under some misconceptions when we look at each other on Sundays as we attend our meetings. Everyone is neatly dressed and greets each other with a smile. It is natural to assume that everyone else has his life under control and doesn’t have to deal with dark little weaknesses and imperfections. There is a natural, probably a mortal, tendency to compare ourselves with others. Unfortunately, when we make these comparisons, we tend to compare our weakest attributes with someone else’s strongest. For example, a woman who feels unschooled in the gospel may take particular note of a woman in her ward who teaches the Gospel Doctrine class and seems to have every scripture at her fingertips. Obviously these kinds of comparisons are destructive and only reinforce the fear that somehow we don’t measure up and therefore we must not be as worthy as the next person.<sup>clxxi</sup>8

Others may look down the staircase and see those that are below them. They may think that because they are further along the path and have been given more light and truth that they are somehow better than those below—smarter, more enlightened, more spiritual, more righteous. All those who take their focus off the step in front of them fail to realize that the race is not to the swift. You will receive no prizes for reaching the top before someone else, and the Lord will not deny you prizes if someone beats you there. All who reach the top of the staircase will receive the same reward, regardless of how long it took to get there.<sup>clxxii</sup>9

The Savior taught this lesson to the impetuous Peter. The senior Apostle questioned the Lord about His dealings with John the Beloved, “What shall this man do?” The Savior responded, “If I will that he tarry till I come, *what is that to thee? follow thou me*” (John 21:21–22; emphasis added).

We must stop worrying about where others are on the staircase, about how we compare, about who has what or who is ahead of whom, about what the Lord is doing with the life of someone else. Our only focus should be on our next step. That is all that really matters. If we progress grace for grace, step by step up the staircase, we will receive the reward we truly desire: eternal life. At that day, what will it matter that others were temporarily ahead of us or that we were temporarily ahead of others on the upward climb?

### **Perfection**

As we climb step after step, it is important that we realize that the distance between us and perfection is not the distance to the top of the staircase. Focusing on *that* distance can become very disheartening. Rather, the distance to perfection is the distance to the step in front of us. We cannot be required to obey as God obeys, until we have been granted the light and knowledge that God possesses. What God requires of us is that we obey according to the light that we *currently* possess—in other words, that we move to the next step. Brigham Young taught:

“Be ye as perfect as ye can,” for that is all we can do, though it is written, be ye perfect as your Father who is in heaven is perfect. To be as perfect as we possibly can, according to our knowledge, is to be just as perfect as our Father in heaven is. He cannot be any more perfect than He knows how, any more than we. When we are doing as well as we know how in the sphere and station which we occupy here, we are justified in the justice, righteousness, mercy, and judgment that go before the Lord of heaven and earth. We are as justified as the angels who are before the throne of God. The sin that will cleave to all the posterity of Adam and Eve is, that they have not done as well as they knew how.<sup>clxxiii</sup>10

The daunting task of reaching the top of the staircase becomes much easier to achieve if we stay focused on the single step ahead of us. At that moment, being “perfect” means standing on that next step. It is well within our power to achieve. It simply means that we live up to what we know is true; that we do what the Spirit has been whispering to our hearts that we must do; that we change and improve our lives. The challenge is that the moment we take that step, perfection moves to the *next* step. And so we continue, chasing perfection up the staircase, one step at a time.

### **What about Death?**

What happens to a person who is slowly climbing up the staircase and is interrupted by death? Certainly, there are many more steps to climb in the afterlife.<sup>clxxiv</sup>11

Amulek declared, “That same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world” (Alma 34:34). Therefore, we conclude that if we are moving up the stairs at the time we leave this world, we will continue the climb in the spirit world. This truth is confirmed by Heavenly Father with this glorious promise: “Wherefore, if ye shall press forward [climbing the staircase], feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end [death], behold, *thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life*” (2 Nephi 31:20; emphasis added).

Ponder that marvelous promise. If you are on the strait and narrow path and if you are diligently, though slowly, climbing the staircase, and you die, the Father has promised that you will have eternal life. This truth helps us understand the words of Elder M. Russell Ballard, “Life isn’t over

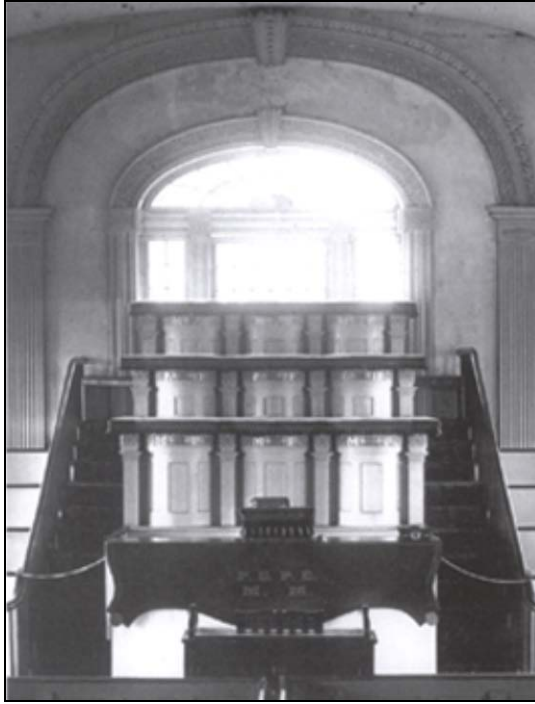
for a Latter-day Saint until he or she is *safely dead*, with their testimony still burning brightly.”<sup>clxxv</sup>12

Elder Bruce R. McConkie added the following:

We don't need to get a complex or get a feeling that you have to be perfect to be saved. You don't. There's only been one perfect person, and that's the Lord Jesus, but in order to be saved in the Kingdom of God and in order to pass the test of mortality, what you have to do is get on the straight and narrow path—thus charting a course leading to eternal life—and then, being on that path, pass out of this life in full fellowship. I'm not saying that you don't have to keep the commandments. I'm saying you don't have to be perfect to be saved. If you did, no one would be saved. The way it operates is this: you get on the path that's named the “straight and narrow.” . . . The straight and narrow path leads . . . a very great distance, to a reward that's called eternal life. If you're on that path and pressing forward, and you die, *you'll never get off the path*. There is no such thing as falling off the straight and narrow path in the life to come. . . . If you're working zealously in this life—though you haven't fully overcome the world and you haven't done all you hoped you might do—you're still going to be saved. . . . You don't have to have an excessive zeal that becomes fanatical and becomes unbalancing. What you have to do is stay in the mainstream of the Church and live as upright and decent people live in the Church—keeping the commandments, paying your tithing, serving in the organizations of the Church, loving the Lord, staying on the straight and narrow path. If you're on that path when death comes . . . you'll never fall off from it, and, for all practical purposes, your calling and election is made sure. Now, that isn't the definition of that term, but the end result will be the same.<sup>clxxvi</sup>13

## Notes

1. Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 75.
2. *Lectures on Faith*, 75–76.
3. If the placing of D&C 93:15 between verses 14 and 16 is any indication, it occurred after His baptism.
4. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 68.
5. John 5:19, 30.
6. Gene R. Cook, “Charity: Perfect and Everlasting Love,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 83.
7. Bible Dictionary, “Grace,” 697.
8. Marvin J. Ashton, “On Being Worthy,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 20.
9. See the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Matthew 20:1–16.
10. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 2:129–30.
11. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 348.
12. Cited in F. Burton Howard, “Commitment,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 28; emphasis added.
13. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Probationary Test of Mortality” (address delivered at the Salt Lake University Institute of Religion, adjacent to the University of Utah, 10 January 1982), 9; emphasis added.



The Melchizedek Priesthood pulpits in August of 1907,  
photo taken by George Edward Anderson

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## Doctrine and Covenants 110 and the Mission of the Church

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The Kirtland Temple was dedicated on 27 March 1836. During the preceding two months and the subsequent month after, “probably more Latter-day Saints beheld visions and witnessed other unusual spiritual manifestations than during any other era in the history of the Church.”<sup>clxxvii</sup><sup>1</sup>

This was a marvelous time during which “members of the Church saw heavenly messengers in at least ten different meetings, and at five of these gatherings different individuals testified that they had beheld the Savior himself. Many experienced visions, some prophesied, and others spoke in tongues.”<sup>clxxviii</sup><sup>2</sup>

Two days after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote that “it was a Pentecost and an endowment indeed, long to be remembered, for the sound shall go forth from this place into the world, and the occurrences of this day shall be handed down upon the pages of sacred history, to all generations; as the day of Pentecost, so shall this day be numbered and celebrated as a year of jubilee, and the time of rejoicing to be Saints of the Most High God.”<sup>clxxix</sup><sup>3</sup>

This prophecy by Joseph Smith has come to pass in several ways. One fulfillment may be the published *sacred history* of this time period by the Church and faithful historians, which has been *handed down* and is now readily available throughout the *world*, although perhaps not enough Saints are as familiar with it as could be. The prayer offered at the dedication of the temple is certainly *remembered* as the only such prayer canonized in the latter days (D&C 109).